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SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, IPA, AND PI; ALSO FOR ECA; NSC FOR
SHAPIRO/KUMAR; TREASURY FOR KNOWLES; JOINT STAFF FOR LTGEN
SELVA; DEPT PASS TO USAID FOR BORODIN

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [KWBG](#) [PREL](#) [OEXC](#) [KMPI](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: GAZA VS. WEST BANK RESIDENCY: A DISTINCTION WITH A
HARSH DIFFERENCE FOR PALESTINIANS

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (SBU) Summary. GOI policy continues to differentiate between West Bank and Gaza residents, with the latter prohibited from living or studying in the West Bank. Even Gaza "residents" who have been in the West Bank for years can find themselves subject to immediate deportation back to Gaza and separation from family, school, and community. A recent case of a young woman studying at Bethlehem University, arrested at a West Bank checkpoint and forcibly relocated to Gaza, has earned international media attention. For the 25,000 Gaza "residents" currently residing in the West Bank, the ability to transfer residency is essentially non-existent. According to human rights organizations, the GOI has recently intensified its efforts to arrest Palestinians in the West Bank who carry Gazan ID cards. End summary.

Go Directly to Gaza:
Do Not Pass Go; Do Not Collect Your Diploma

12. (SBU) A GOI policy that differentiates between Palestinians who "reside" in the West Bank and those who "reside" in Gaza, based on historical family ties, prevents Palestinians deemed "Gaza residents" from working, studying, or living in the West Bank. Even those who have lived for years in the West Bank are subject to deportation to Gaza if detected by the GOI.

13. (SBU) According to Israeli NGOs Hamoked and Gisha, the GOI has intensified the number of arrests and removals to Gaza in the last several months, to levels not seen since 2003. The GOI has arrested Palestinians with ID cards registered in Gaza at internal checkpoints within the West Bank, within their West Bank homes (a reportedly new phenomenon), upon completion of a prison term, and when entering Jerusalem or "Green Line" Israel without a permit. They are then removed to Gaza even if their family, home, and business are in the West Bank, and even if they have few or no ties to Gaza.

14. (SBU) In a case that has received significant media attention, on October 28, Berlanty Azzam, a 21-year-old Palestinian student just two months short of her graduation from Bethlehem University, was arrested at a checkpoint near Ramallah by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) after she provided them her Gaza ID card. According to interviews that she has since given, Azzam was held by IDF personnel at the checkpoint for five hours, blindfolded, and returned to Gaza during the night. According to the NGO Gisha, the GOI has acknowledged it made a "mistake" in sending Azzam to Gaza prior to a judicial review, but refuses to consider allowing

her to return to Bethlehem to complete her studies.

¶5. (SBU) In another case, Samir Abu Yousef, a carpenter with his own shop in the West Bank city of Qalqiliya, was arrested in February 2008 for illegally entering Israel and transferred to Gaza. His wife, four children, and business remain in the West Bank. (He entered the West Bank in 1999 to study at Bir Zeit University.) Over the last 21 months, his appeals to return to the West Bank have been rejected. Requests for Abu Yousef's wife to visit him in Gaza were reportedly also refused unless she agreed to remain in Gaza.

¶6. (SBU) In June 2009, the GOI initially denied entry to the West Bank to a 16-year-old Palestinian girl returning from her USG-funded YES high school exchange program due to the fact she carried a Gazan ID. Her family had lived in Ramallah for over a decade. She was allowed to rejoin her family only after USG intervention with the GOI, led by Embassy Tel Aviv.

Gazans Barred from West Bank Universities

¶7. (SBU) Since 2000, the GOI has barred all Gaza residents from studying at universities in the West Bank. According to Gisha, the GOI has made no exceptions. Bethlehem University has been unable to secure approval to enroll a Gaza resident since 2000, though it counts 430 Gazans among its alumni since its founding in 1973. (Bethlehem University has recently initiated a full scholarship program for 12 students from Gaza. To date, they have been unable to secure a single permit.)

JERUSALEM 00002021 002 OF 002

"Moving" Is Not An Option...

¶8. (C) According to Palestinian Authority (PA) officials and NGO reports, since 2000, the GOI has refused to accept individual applications from Palestinians to "move" their residency from Gaza to the West Bank, even if they and their family are already present in the West Bank. According to Hussein al-Sheikh, the head of PA Civil Administration, the only exceptions have been granted as favors to the PA leadership in response to official requests the PA puts forth for PA officials. The total number adjusted in this fashion totals perhaps a few hundred.

¶9. (SBU) In late 2007, the GOI initiated a new practice of issuing "staying permits" that allow Palestinians registered with Gazan addresses to remain "temporarily" in the West Bank. The qualifying criteria are reportedly so restrictive as to prevent most Palestinians from obtaining the permits.

...Leaving Some Trapped

¶10. (C) According to the PA Office for Civilian Affairs, approximately 25,000 Palestinians with Gazan ID cards live in the West Bank, many of whom refrain from traveling at all for fear of arrest and removal to Gaza. Musbah Abu Deeb moved to the West Bank in 1999 at age 18. He currently works as a Web manager at Bir Zeit University. His request to change his address to the West Bank was denied in 2005. Out of fear of arrest, he has not left the Ramallah area since 1999, turning down good job offers in Bethlehem and Nablus, preventing him from studying abroad and from visiting his ill father in Gaza.

Impact on USG Outreach

¶11. (SBU) The GOI policy of barring Gaza residents from studying in the West Bank will effectively prevent us from including Gaza residents in the Secretary's A-PLUS education

awards. Gazans selected for the program would be limited to one or two increasingly non-competitive universities in Gaza, whereas they might choose from at least seven competitive universities in the West Bank. As noted above, the policy also has implications for our YES students and other exchange programs.

RUBINSTEIN